

PREFACE

At the request of the Government of Travancore and Cochin, the late Mr. S. S. Srinivasan, Secretary to Government, Travancore and Cochin, invited Mr. S. S. Srinivasan, *mitran*, to deliver a series of four lectures on the subject of "The Press and the Public" at the Victoria Public Hall at Trivandrum on successive evenings from the 15th to 18th August 1944. The lectures were presided over by Sachivottama Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Dewan of Travancore on the first day, Mr. T. M. Krishnaswami Aiyar, Chief Justice of Travancore on the second day, Dewan Bahadur V. S. Subramonia Aiyar, Retired Dewan on the third day and Mr. H. C. Papworth, Pro-Vice Chancellor on the last day. The lectures were well attended and widely appreciated and in response to public request they are now issued in book form.

PRESS

AND

PUBLIC

WITH *Foreword*
by
The Rt. Hon'ble
**V. S. SRINIVASA
SASTRI**

AND *Introduction*
by
Sachivottama
**Sir C. P. RAMASWAMI
AIYAR**

SRINIVASAN

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**SWADESAMITRAN
MADRAS**



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PREFACE

At the request of the Travancore University Mr. C. R. Srinivasan, Editor, *The Swadesamitran*, Madras, delivered a course of four lectures on Journalism under the following heads: (1) Origin and development,—(2) News and comments, (3) Circulation and advertisement, (4) Organisation and control, at the Victoria Jubilee Hall at Trivandrum on successive evenings from the 15th to 18th August 1944. The lectures were presided over by Sachivottama Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Dewan of Travancore on the first day, Mr. T. M. Krishnaswami Aiyar, Chief Justice of Travancore on the second day, Dewan Bahadur V. S. Subramonia Aiyar, Retired Dewan on the third day and Mr. H. C. Papworth, Pro-Vice Chancellor on the last day. The lectures were well attended and widely appreciated and in response to public request they are now issued in book form.

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An expert that can treat his subject attractively is not common. Mr. C. R. Srinivasan, whose experience of journalism is extensive, has the knack of selecting out of his large stock of knowledge those items that the ordinary man would like to hear about and that would make it easy for him to learn more. In this country journalism is a growing child, who, left to himself, may become a deformed and ungovernable giant. It is a matter for congratulation that, before things get out of hand, leading members of the profession should have organized it, though for limited purposes, for the habit of introspection must in time cause the essential conditions of useful service to be generally known and improved. Institutions, specially meant for public education, are fast being rivalled and may be soon left behind by the radio and the daily newspaper and of this pair, the second will continue for

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generations yet to be the more powerful as it is the elder. Retrospect, description and forecast are combined in Mr. Srinivasan's lectures in judicious proportion. Where censure is called for, it is administered in a kindly and understanding spirit and not in the manner of the superior critic. Where prophecy is indulged in, one notices an attitude of caution rarely seen in a zealous member of the profession. How the statesman, the party enthusiast and the general reader can help in the regulation of the future development of journalism is also made apparent in an indirect way to the intelligent reader. I am glad the lecturer has decided to benefit a wider circle than may be privileged to listen to him.

Life, the whole of it with its infinite diversity, is the material on which the journalist is employed. The multiplicity of adventitious branches of work, each with a technique of its own, threatens to overshadow and smother the original core. Mr. Srinivasan has not lost sight of the danger. In India we seem only

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reproducing with fatal facility the noxious outgrowth instead of the inner sap and virtue of the original western stem. The need therefore is compelling of the more responsible and better placed journals creating and maintaining in constant efficiency a specific vehicle of what may be called professional public opinion, whose beneficent influence may be unobtrusively operative in all grades. No outsider can give more than a remote hint of what is wanted. Let me mention one clear requirement of the day. For many years now, all who watch public affairs have noticed with sorrow and anxiety the sinister part played by the lower vernacular press in spreading the poison of inter-communal distrust and hatred. No part of India would seem to be free from it. At this very moment it is causing the utmost mischief to the country, and there is no patriot but has his bread every day spoiled by its admixture. Is there a possible antidote? If there is, it is the business first and foremost of the journalist to discover and apply it. The foreign rule, the general public and the devasta-

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ting effect of unrestricted competition are all to blame. It is not enough to point to these and wring our hands. Those who prosper and make a name in the profession ought to devise a means of keeping the fountain of public opinion pure and capable of cleansing itself from day to day.

V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI.

INTRODUCTION

The thirst for news and the tendency of the bazaar and market-place to pass comments on current topics are as old as humanity. It is not a mere figure of speech when it is asserted that in ancient India information was imparted more rapidly from mouth to mouth than by means of galloping postmen. What we know of the life of Athens through Greek dramatists enables us to appreciate the flair for news which characterised the most talented race of ancient Europe. It is however to the credit of China that the beginnings of newspaper enterprise originated there and the so-called *acts diurna* of Rome, namely the budget of daily news circulated in the capital city, followed long after. England, France and the Low Countries however on account of their commercial necessities embarked very early on the task of collecting and publishing news from abroad as well as abstracts of local happenings. Battling against Star Chamber

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edicts and the prohibition of foreign news and against the prohibition of public reports of Parliamentary debates, the early journalists of England, amongst whom Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, was a pioneer, founded the modern newspaper as well as the serial story; and some of the greatest men of letters in the 17th and 18th centuries helped in the creation of the newspaper as we now know it. Swift was the father of the leading article, Bolingbroke and others contributed political news, philosophy and anecdote, and the description of social and literary events, grave and gay, was initiated by Dr. Johnson, Steele and Addison who were eminent men of letters as well as accomplished journalists. It was only, however, after the cheapening of postage and paper that, in the 18th century, such papers as the *Morning Chronicle* and the *London Times* were founded, the latter, under the editorship of the fierce and pugnacious Captain Sterling, acquired great prestige and the name of the "Thunderer". Its history is in fact an epitome of the rise and growth of the English Daily

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Journal. Starting as a kind of *ensor morum* it became one of the main influences operating in England in the political and social spheres until Lord Northcliffe acquired a controlling interest in it. Apprehending the threatened commercialising of the newspaper, counter measures were taken and, today, notwithstanding its limited circulation, the London *Times*, like its confrere the *Manchester Guardian* exercises an influence on public affairs wholly disproportionate to its circulation. The days when men like Coleridge, Moore, Lamb and Wordsworth contributed to the *Morning Post*, and later on when Dickens, Mark Lemon and Douglas Jerrold were connected with the *Daily News*, cannot perhaps be revived. The immense circulation figures of today's papers, the demand for supplements on various technical and interesting subjects, the subsidies offered by great political parties exemplified by the purchase of the *Daily Chronicle* by Lloyd George, the rise of the cartoon and the caricature, and finally the introduction of the commercial

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and sensational elements into newspaper-enterprise by Pearson, Burnham, Northcliffe, Beaverbrook and the Berrys, have transformed the modern newspaper out of all recognition. Catering to the ever-increasing desire for bright "snippets" and the anxiety to acquire some knowledge of every topic however recondite, the short paragraph, the local news column, the interview and the personal tit-bits, as well as passing comments on such varied subjects as finance, fashion, art, music and literary tit-bits have overwhelmed the original ideals. To Kennedy Jones of the *Daily Mail* is attributed the remark made to John Morley that in the hey-day of journalism, it was a profession whereas it is now a branch of trade.

The amalgamations and syndicates that have characterised the history of recent journalism have led to the increased ascendancy of the proprietor as such and the subordination of the editor—a process which was manfully resisted by some of the greatest

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journalists like C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian*, one of the last of the editor-proprietors as, well as by J. L. Garvin, A. G. Gardiner and J. A. Spender. At the same time, the great advantages of editorial anonymity are also being lost to the world. The main features of latter-day journalism are the by-products of cheaper cable communications, the triumph of the wireless, and the intrusion of many extraneous elements like insurance policies, competitions, crossword puzzles, promises of free trips and entertainments and the enthronement of advertisement as a predominant factor. No wonder that journalism has been getting to be yellower and yellower. The emphasis on headlines has obscured the fundamental aspects for which the best journalism of the past was noted. Happily, however, a reaction is now apparent. The true journalist is asserting himself and is taking his place in society and is evolving from the position of a hack writer to that of a self-respecting and articulate member of a great profession.

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The history of Indian Journalism has followed a parallel course to that outlined above, although persons like Surendranath Bannerjee, Motilal Ghosh, Dr. Besant, Kasturi Ranga Aiyangar, A. Rangaswami Aiyangar, Kalinath Roy, Chintamani and Natarajan have maintained the highest standards of self-respect and integrity and of considered judgments on current affairs without fear or favour, without succumbing to sensationalism for its own sake.

Mr. C. R. Srinivasan, who was a colleague of Mr. A. Rangaswami Aiyangar who had been long associated with the *Swadesamitran*, the leading Tamil Daily in Madras, and who is in addition a polished writer with a keen sense of humour has performed a real service in placing before the public the fruits of his ripe experience and of his literary and political perceptions. In the four lectures delivered under the auspices of the Travancore University republished in this volume, he has dealt with the development of the profession, the place

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of news and comments, circulation and advertisement as well as organisation and control. Tracing the history of the Indian Press, he rightly lays emphasis upon the potentialities of the Vernacular Press as the inevitable and irreplaceable adjunct of all mass movements and mass culture and he happily chooses the *Anania Bazaar Patrika* of Bengal as an exemplar. He nevertheless pleads for the closest collaboration amongst the protagonists of Anglo-Indian, Indian and Vernacular Journalism and expects a great future for the all-India bodies which are endeavouring to regiment and canalise the activities of the Press as a whole. Mr. Srinivasan wields an elegant style and his literary instincts are apparent. All the same with the evolution of the newspaper from being a caterer to the leisured classes to the position of the instructor of the working classes, he recognises the inevitability of the expansion of news and picturesque tit-bits at the expense of balanced and reasoned comment and the consequent relegation of the editor to a lower place than heretofore. In his own

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language “The job of the editor is today virtually held by an editorial Board on which business interests hold an important, if not a dominant, place”. He also adverts to the close connection between circulation and advertisement, and, however, reluctantly, he admits that interest is being interpreted in terms of excitement and sensation. He has not reconciled himself to this denouement and I make no doubt that he and other leaders will continue to struggle against the vulgarisation and the syndicating of Indian journalism. He pleads in his last lecture for the careful recruitment of adequately equipped journalists secure from small temptations as apart from temporary employment of amateur hacks. Mr. Srinivasan refers to the troubled events of the last few years and their reaction on the Press ; but he does not lose sight of many other features like the intrusion of the magazine section into the daily paper as well as of fashion notes and personal news and salacious and disguised advertisements. One cannot but agree with him in his judgement that under present

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conditions the greater the circulation of the newspaper the less becomes the freedom of the editor. The problem is rightly stated by him : to depend on whether the editor should give the people what they like or what he considers is fit for them. This alternative, in different forms, has always been present to the journalist and the writer to the magazines, and one can only hope that Indian tradition and culture will save us from the perils which have confronted, and to which have succumbed, some of the greatest newspapers of the world.

The sincere thanks of the public are due to Mr. Srinivasan for having presented in a small compass the history, the trials and the perils as well as the achievements and prospects of the Indian Press.

C. P. RAMASWAMI AIYAR.

I

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT.

Many are the miracles of the modern age. Of them all I should think the greatest is the modern newspaper. It is not only a miracle in itself. It has laid the foundation for the many miracles that we have witnessed in modern life. How was this possible? The main function of a newspaper has been the spread of knowledge. Knowledge has ever been reckoned in terms of power. In the early days of history, it was jealously guarded and maintained as the patrimony of the few. When the art of writing had not been discovered, knowledge was handed down from father to son and from preceptor to pupil by word of mouth. With the discovery and development of writing, it became possible to have records of the discoveries and advances made in science, art and literature. But these were still beyond the means of the common folk. The art of publication, though antecedent to

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the art of printing, found its full vigour and volume only after the invention of movable types and printing machines. It then became possible to acquire at will the accumulated experience of the past on all matters that man was interested in, if only he was prepared to pay a modest price. With the widening of the reading public the value of publicity came to be recognised also. In printing, publication and publicity we have all the ingredients that go to make the modern newspaper.

The printing press was introduced in Europe towards the middle of the 15th Century. It came into India in the 16th Century. At the beginning, vested interests were concerned to guard the use of the press, presumably with a view to controlling liberty of thought. It was feared that the press might prove an active ferment in the body politic, churning up trouble for all organisations holding power and having influence at the time. Powers, spiritual and temporal, were leagued together, to start with, to control the inroads of the press. When these two fell out, the press found

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fuller vent, but, still, its range of influence was limited to the classes, as literacy had not spread among the masses. It was only a limitation of time, which time itself proceeded effectively to cure. It is easy to visualise graphically the passage of power progressively from the apex to the base. Every stage marked but the beginning of the next one. Every new stage widened the scope of the press and, with every widening, the public began to take an increasing part in the affairs of the nation. The introduction of universal education and manhood suffrage in England widened it beyond all recognition, with the result that the Press came to be recognised and reckoned as the Fourth Estate of the Realm.

The high water-mark of progress, both of the press and the public, is to be seen in Modern England. The Press has proved itself the guardian and guarantor of the rights of the people. The old slogan "Vox Populi Vox Dei" developed real meaning at the hands of the Press. The greatest good of the greatest number is the professed objective of every administration. In

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political theory, no Government can be carried on without the consent of the people. That consent, presumably, was passive to start with; it became active when opportunities were forthcoming to give organised expression to the will of the people. The printing press provided the mechanics of such expression and, as it developed, responsive administration graduated into responsible administration. From the printing press first came pamphlets and periodicals, and as the reading public grew, periodicity became a matter of hours and not days. That is how the daily press came into existence. Under the stress of competition, it proceeded to develop all the ancillary services that are associated with newspaper production of to-day.

The history of every country records the struggle of the pioneers of the press. Nowhere in the world did the press have a free and uninterrupted passage to power. Those in authority did not take kindly to the voice of criticism, however well-intentioned, and everywhere one finds evidence of the struggle between those who held the

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reins of authority and those who would call them to order. That struggle could have but one end, for, the voice of criticism in essence is like unto the voice of conscience. It may be stifled for a time; it cannot be stifled for all time. The voice of criticism derives its strength and sustenance from the people and so long as it holds to these moorings it cannot go far wrong. In immoral hands it may express itself in undesirable ways for a time, but with the public acting as its own censor, no paper can survive if it proves false to its trust.

Reference is frequently made to the power of the Press. What really is the power of the Press? On ultimate analysis, it will be found to be no more and no less than the power of the people. Where the voice of the people prevails, there the power of the Press is self-evident. Where it does not, the primary function of the Press is to see that the voice of the people prevails. With a vigilant press, ever on the alert to seek and seize opportunities, the transfer of power to its source cannot be long delayed or denied. The source of power in any

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State, I venture to suggest, is lodged in the people ; the sanction of every Government rests there. In the battle for freedom, the legitimate press is, therefore, to be found in the fore-front of the fight. To the extent that the press is not free, to that extent it may be claimed that the people also are not free. A free nation cannot maintain its freedom either, without a free press. The continent of Europe provides abundant evidence of this fact. President Roosevelt in his famous speech on the Four Freedoms gave the place of primacy to Freedom of Speech. That has a significance not to be missed by the discerning. Freedom of Speech, let me add, implies freedom of publication also.

Power is vested in the press merely as the agent and attorney of the people. It will inhere there only so long as the people have confidence in the press. That confidence was secured at great risks and considerable sacrifices. The pioneers of the Press were men of vision and character, with leisure and means to fulfil their urge for social service. The organisation they

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built up for sustained service has developed commercial proportions in a competitive world. Circulation widened with the invasion of capital and enterprise, and the press has since developed into a major industry with mass production and mechanisation. Every decade has registered progress in means and methods of production, and one wonders whether the ideals of service originally professed by the founders will survive the onslaught of the market-place. I do not feel depressed at the prospect for this reason. However much commercialisation may spoil the pitch laid by the pioneers, the redeeming feature of the situation lies in the fact that commercial success directly depends on the measure of social service that the press continues to render. This is an indeterminate and incalculable factor; that is why although money flows freely for a press venture, it is still rated as an adventure. Adventure or not, the attraction is there and is proving well nigh irresistible. Even in this country, big business, fighting for freedom in the upper reaches of industry and commerce, has begun to invade the

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press field as a profitable sideline to reinsure success in their main lines of activities.

The quality of service rendered by the press to society has taken new connotations under the stress of competition. With the expansion of service, specialisation has set in and every day's paper has become a marvel of production. There is so much in it to interest, inform and instruct the reader and it is made available at such a ridiculously low price, that it is no wonder that newspapers have begun to take rank as necessities. Food for the mind has become as important as food for the body. In England, statistics prove that there are few families which do not take any newspaper and there are many which take more than one. The daily growing reading public continues to be stimulated and sustained by bounties and benefits, with the result that the circulations of papers are now reckoned not in thousands, not in lakhs, but in millions. Alongside of this, an imperceptible change has come over in the matter and make-up of the paper. The main appeal of the newspaper is now directed not so much to the classes as

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to the masses. Qualitatively, perhaps, it has suffered, but quantitatively, certainly, it has gained enormously. Measured in terms of service, the advantage, I should say, still rests with the community.

The greatest achievement of the Press during the past fifty years is the way it has shepherded the lower middle classes into the reading fold. The modern newspaper represents the results and reactions of this development. As the largest contributors to the strength, stability and success of newspapers, their tastes and interests came to be studied with scientific precision and exploited for all they were worth. In the result, it may truly be claimed to-day that interest and not instruction has come to be the guiding principle of successful papers. Even established newspapers of old have had to yield ground to the new force that has invaded the press world. A study of the history of the Press in England will easily bear this out. Few papers of the mid-Victorian age have survived the onslaught. The *London Times*,

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no doubt, still exists ; but it cannot be said to flourish. It has only got a tenth of the circulation that the new popular dailies claim, though it continues to command respect and attention in knowledgeable circles. The intellectual classes continue to take it but, with the popular press commanding the field, it is emotional rather than intellectual strength that counts. If it is recognised that the mainsprings of life are dominated and directed in the last resort by the mass mind, the influences that hammer on it, day in and day out, are bound to win in the end.

The Press in India is still in the Victorian stage of progress. The history of the press in this country offers a fascinating study to students of constitutional history. A volume surveying the field in perspective has yet to be written, though there is an abundance of material for the earnest student of research. I am afraid, however, I can do no more than refer to the main features of the press as it has developed in this country. To start with, it may readily be admitted that the Indian Press

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is an off-shoot of the British Press and came into this country along with other British institutions, not as a result of conscious or calculated thought, but as part of the adventure of the days of John Company. In its early years, this pseudo-Indian Press, neither studied nor sought the interests of the sons of the soil. James Hicky and Silk Buckingham, the pioneers of the "Indian" press, were not very much concerned with the fate or fortunes of the country. Their appeal was directed to the outlanders in the country and their main objective was to find for themselves a place in the sun.

The first appeal to redeem and reclaim the sons of the soil came from the Christian Missionaries but it was directed to improving their lot not so much in this world as in the next. It was not long, however, before an indigenous press began to rear its head and add to the complexities of an administration, still uncertain of its range, and undecided as to its objective. Those were the days of John Company struggling to acquire and run an Empire with the

mind and make-up of a Cheap Jack. Trade was the ruling interest and dominated Governmental activities. The means and methods adopted by them in the pursuit of their interests could rarely bear examination from the standpoint of law or morality, and it is no wonder they proceeded to deal summarily with their early critics. The power of deportation which they fully used, however, failed to serve them when the voice of criticism took local habitation. The mind of the 19th Century bureaucrat moved along the same lines as that of his 20th Century confrere, and censorship of a rigid and unyielding character was frequently imposed to choke the voice of criticism. With the passing of the administration of India under the direct rule of the Crown, one anomalous situation ended, but soon yielded place to another.

That, I presume, was inevitable under alien domination. The Anglo-Indian Press bore the brunt of the fight with constituted authority in the early days. An indigenous press then grew up with different objectives

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altogether. When India passed under the direct administration of the Crown, the clash of interests that divided the Anglo-Indian Press from the Government of the day progressively diminished in force. Simultaneously an identity of interests between that section of the Press and the Government, both representing the ruling classes, proceeded to emerge. As the indigenous press grew in strength and purpose, that identity tended to be more and more emphasised, with the result that in the post-Victorian period we find the erstwhile champions of the people transformed into champions of the Government. The role of interpreters of Governmental policy and apologists for Governmental action assumed by the Anglo-Indian Press served effectively to divide them from their brethren in the profession who were championing the popular cause. For a time, no doubt, this gave the Anglo-Indian Press a privileged position, but it proved, in the end, a very costly privilege. No amount of Government patronage can make up for the loss of public support; and the history of the

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Press in India provides abundant illustration of this truth. The *Pioneer*, most favoured of the Anglo-Indian group at one time, passed into Indian hands recently. The *Englishman*, the oldest among the group, has ceased to exist.

Whatever the measure of importance one may be inclined to attach to the early history of the Press in India, few will deny that the press as a force in the public life of the country came to be recognised only after the birth of the Congress. There are papers, no doubt, which may well take credit for blazing the trail for the Congress; but even they cannot deny that they themselves drew strength and sustenance from the Congress. The Congress provided the focal point to the aims and ambitions of Indian politicians. At the start it lacked both direction and drive. It was still in the stage of divine discontent—a nameless revolt against existing order; a formless desire to improve on it. On this shapeless mass the Indian Press proceeded to hammer out face and features. Sustained agitation led to

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small reforms. The little that was given served but to whet the appetite for more. It took twenty years for the Congress to define its goal, develop its sanctions, and thereafter it became a struggle between vested and di-vested interests. That struggle, alternating between reform and repression, continues to this day, but any detailed examination of that struggle is not germane to the subject matter of my lecture. I am only concerned here to point out the results and reactions of that situation on the Press.

In the first phase of its development, the Congress represented the revolt of the classes rather than of the masses. The classes claimed to represent the masses. But the very education they had imbibed, which incidentally was also responsible for their discontent, divided them from the ignorant masses, and robbed them of their strength. No reform movement can prevail against the established power without popular support. In the second phase of its development, Congress proceeded to remedy

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the defect by sustained propaganda, calculated to educate the public to a proper appreciation of their rights and privileges. From the needs of this propaganda the vernacular press drew sustenance and strength and moved to the front rank of the political movement. The potentialities of the vernacular press have yet to be exploited in full; and until they are fully exploited the National movement will lack its full strength. The glamour of the English press still holds, and the best talents of the profession are attracted to it. Those who enter vernacular journalism generally do not possess the knowledge and equipment that the profession expects of its votaries; this is the more unfortunate as the risks of vernacular journalism are relatively greater; politically it is suspect in the eyes of the Government as it is published in languages they do not understand; financially it is not strong, as the advertisement source of its revenue has yet to be developed. But if India is to have a Press whose circulation runs into millions, obviously that kind of expansion is only possible with the vernacular press. This is

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indicated in no uncertain measure by the phenomenal progress of the *Ananda Bazaar Patrika* of Bengal, which to-day claims the largest circulation among Indian papers.

The Indian Press to-day consists of three groups—the Anglo-Indian Press, the Indo-English Press, and the Vernacular Press. Financially the first group is the strongest as it is favoured by the Government and the business world. Politically the second group is the strongest as, at the moment, it represents the classes on whom the burden of leadership rests; potentially the third group should count strongest by reason of its mass-contact. It is only of recent years that the spirit of *ccamaraderie* has drawn these three groups together for common endeavour to maintain press rights and privileges. The contact is still slender and there have been occasions when politics threatened to overwhelm professional bonds. But closer association has created mutual respect, and, under cautious lead, the spirit that has been discovered should grow strong. Apart from the Journalists' Associations in

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various parts of the country there are two All-India bodies—The Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society and the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference—which command the allegiance of all the three groups I have referred to, and both have proved themselves of service to the Press as a whole. The first body deals with the business side of newspaper enterprise; the second with the relations between the Government and the Press. They have realised the advantages of a common front under the difficult conditions of war and if they serve as well in peace-time as in war, a strong and virile Press, capable of serving the country in fuller and freer measure, may confidently be looked forward to.

II

NEWS AND COMMENTS

Readers of newspapers are aware of the main contents of the paper. These consist of news and comments. The stock-in-trade of a newspaper is news. That is why it is called a newspaper—a news-giving paper. What is news? Many a definition has been attempted, but none has materialised that may be rated as complete or comprehensive. The basic definition, of course is that whatever is new is news. This does not take us far, for we know that all that is new has not news-value. How is this news-value created? Broadly speaking, two qualifications may be reckoned as giving news their news-value. They are interest and importance. Whom to interest and how to rate importance? Newspapers circulate

among a large body of readers. What is of interest and importance to this body provides the yard-stick of value. That measure may vary from paper to paper according to the range and reach of each paper. A financial paper has no use for sporting news ; a newspaper circulating countrywide has no space for news of local interest. The production of a daily newspaper, under modern conditions, has become a constant struggle between selection of news and provision of space. Catering to different classes and interests, and, counting its circulation cumulatively, by covering the needs of as many groups and sections as possible, the art of production has become synonymous with the art of journalism. To the experienced journalist, the blend of interest and importance in the news he handles, has become almost second nature, and his blue pencil travels over the script copy with uncanny precision and automatic speed. The twin attributes of news serve to cut up news into vertical and horizontal sections, and they move into place in the daily sheet according to conditions and circumstances.

NEWS AND COMMENTS

A comparison of the news contents between a Travancore paper and a Madras paper and a further comparison of an earlier edition with a later edition of the same day's paper will provide practical illustration of the points I have mentioned just now.

News is not a factory product to be manufactured on order or bought at will. It is a record of events gathered from different quarters. The word news itself has been interpreted to give point to this view. The four letters *N*, *E*, *W* and *S* represent the four points of the compass, viz., north, east, west and south, and news is what is gathered from all quarters. Obviously it is not possible for every newspaper to have its correspondents, scattered the world over, for the collection of news. News agencies have therefore sprung into existence to provide news to newspapers. Of these agencies, the best known, at any rate, so far as this country is concerned, is Reuters. It may interest you to know that Reuter did not start first as a news-service to newspapers. In the middle of the 19th

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century, the founder of the service, Julius Reuter, set up business in England to provide money market news for commercial houses in England. Realising soon the possibilities of expanding the service for the benefit of newspapers, he created an organisation to tap Continental news, calculated to interest the lay reader. He teamed up with Havas of France and Wolff of Germany to cover the Continent, and as European interests dominated the world, quite a comprehensive service developed in course of time. The service of news is a great responsibility and the source must be above and beyond suspicion. It became possible to ensure this when Reuter's family became extinct and a trust was created to take over the service. That trust has since been acquired by the Press Association of England representing the provincial Press of England. To-day Reuters may claim to be the best organised service of the world, with representatives in every part of the world and having access to the news-pool of regional services by special arrangement.

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Reuters cover the foreign news for the Indian papers and, latterly, there has been a growing feeling that the coverage is both inadequate and unsatisfactory. Perhaps the political relations between England and India account, in part, for the feeling that, in the service and selection of news, Reuters show a sub-conscious bias towards the established order of things and oftentimes omit or overlook items of news which are *en rapport* with Indian views and aspirations. It is this feeling that is responsible for the agitation that the monopoly clause in Reuters' contracts with papers should be removed, leaving it free to the papers to subscribe for alternative and auxiliary services. This has now been conceded, but, newspapers will not find it easy to take in other services, until equal telegraph facilities are awarded to competitive services by the State. In war-time the Government may not be disposed to relax existing controls, but the problem cannot be evaded when peace comes. Already, the American United Press has got its foot in and may be expected to put up a fight for a free field

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The service it has offered to the Indian papers, within the limits of its opportunity, has created some goodwill for it, but we have not had enough of it to judge its quality and consistency. There is also a suggestion, now being seriously canvassed that the Indian Press should take over collectively the service of Reuters in India, when they would have an opportunity to influence the news range. This again is a problem that will have to be considered on its merits, only in the post-war period.

The first organised press service for inland news came into existence at the beginning of this century. It is known as the Associated Press of India and is owned to-day by Reuters. How this service came to be organised should interest you. At the headquarters of the Government of India were stationed Special Correspondents of some of the leading papers to secure news of Governmental activities. The *Pioneer* occupied at the time a position of vantage by reason of its intimate contact with the Civil and Military authorities at

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Simla. That enabled its correspondent to score every time over competing papers. The correspondents of the *Englishman*, and the *Statesman* and the *Indian Daily News* clubbed their resources together to found a service which they offered first to their papers and next to others willing to subscribe to their service. Buck and Coates were the prime movers, but it was the genius of K. C. Roy that gave the service its progressive value and importance. The first two tried to cold-shoulder Roy at the start, but when the latter proceeded to organise an independent service of his own, they found that the balance of advantage lay in carrying him with them. The A. P. I. has now its local offices at all important centres of publication, and when Reuters came into the picture buying up Buck's and Coates' holding, their resources proved useful to stabilise and widen the scope of the service.

An organised inland service is naturally a matter of interest and importance to the Government of the country and any help it

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renders by way of subscription to the service, is bound to be viewed with suspicion in a country struggling for freedom. With the growing importance of Indian-owned papers, the desire to have a service, free of all taint, has found concrete expression, more than once, but so far competing services have not found sufficient support to stabilise themselves. The Free Press Service gave great promise at the start, but its financial backers looked for quick results and favoured publicity for themselves, with the result that the service itself grew lopsided and undependable. Out of the debris, was born the United Press Service, content to serve as a supplementary service with a definite national bias. The Orient Service has recently come into the field, with affiliations calculated to give the Muslim slant to news. One important result of the emergence of these supplementary services has been to ginger up the quality of the service given by the Associated Press of India. There is a proposal to acquire the A. P. I. from Reuters on behalf of the Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society and

make it a self-contained and self-controlled service. Negotiations were started some-time back to this end, but had to be suspended for the duration of the war.

I have so far referred to organised news agencies, which provide the bulk of the news carried by a news paper. News derived from agency sources suffer from two inherent defects. First, it is available to all who subscribe to the service and, from a competitive angle, offers therefore no advantage to one paper against another. Secondly, news offered by agencies is essentially an objective presentation of facts and therefore colourless and featureless; an agency report has to be so if it is to serve all papers. The difference between one paper and another arises in part from comment and criticism but the larger part, at any rate, in the case of a daily paper, arises from its news contents. The little more that distinguishes one paper from another is by no means a negligible factor; further, even in respect of news covered by an agency, it is useful to have somebody, who would provide background news to help understanding and appreciation of the news

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proper. For these reasons, in spite of a standard news service being available, it is the practice of newspapers to have their own corps of correspondents, as and when they can afford it.

In England prominent newspapers have their staff correspondents, not merely in important centres in England, but also in various parts of the world. As England possesses financial and political interests all over the world, the need for a supplemental service corps of this dimension is easy to recognise. In India, however, we have not developed thus far. Many newspapers, however, possess London Correspondents, for the reason that events and influences in England have a vital bearing on the future of this country. Beyond that, the utmost that Indian papers can do is to have special correspondents in provincial centres. In some provinces, notably Madras, provincial news continues to be covered by staff correspondents who are assured of a minimum income to make it worth their while. Indian papers, the best of them, still count their circulation

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in tens of thousands and on the margin left to them, they have shown commendable enterprise in the organisation of this exclusive service. It may be useful to stress in this connection, that India is a land of distances, that no paper can count on circulation in areas beyond twenty-four hours' reach, and that most papers depend for circulation on extensive and not intensive reach.

Compared to conditions that prevailed even as late as thirty years back, the lot of the moffusil correspondent has, it must be conceded, greatly improved. Payment for contributions in those days was the exception. Contributors themselves did not expect it. If they were public men, publication itself was sufficient recompense ; if they worked for a consideration, they looked for payment elsewhere ! Men living by their wits found it to their advantage to adopt some paper, for purposes of their own, and used their morganatic connection to levy a tithe of their own in the field of their activity. Their contributions were capricious as they levied their toll not only for supplying

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but also for suppressing news. Occasionally, stories of their unconventional activities used to reach newspaper offices, but, the latter were powerless to intervene and preferred to turn the Nelson-eye to such activities, so long as they did not assume scandalous proportions. Things have radically altered during the past twenty-five years, and today it may be claimed that there is little that is published as news for which money is not paid by the publishing newspaper.

Payment for service has helped to establish regulation and control. It may be there is still room for complaint. But with the new order of men it may safely be asserted that there is neither mischief nor malice in the reports they furnish. Those who err in ignorance will in time show greater responsibility. Newspapers themselves have begun to realise that staff correspondents carry the honour of the paper in their hands, functioning as they do as the eyes and ears of the paper. There is therefore more care

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shown in the selection and greater appreciation of the need to have qualified men of character if responsibility is to be expected. The misfits of life, who sought a refuge in this profession, in days gone by, obviously have no place there. It is my considered view that all that makes for success in any walk of life is needed in a fuller measure to succeed in the profession of journalism ; and I would go further and claim that whoever succeeds in journalism will command like success elsewhere.

The reason is this. The normal life of the journalist is so beset with temptations that whoever survives and then succeeds must possess outstanding virtues. To start with, it is a poorly paid profession as emoluments go. There are compensations, of course. The journalist is treated with courtesy and consideration wherever he goes. He is a welcome and honoured guest in every public show. But if he has a sense of humour in him he must, oftentimes, feel like the guest of honour at a Barmecide feast. At every turn none better than he

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can realise what he has missed in life. In chronicling the success of others, he sees what he has lost for himself. A front seat in the wings of the public stage cannot compensate for a back seat in social life, unless a sense of service sustains and solaces him. There is no institution that can so prepare a man for service leavened with sacrifice. The technique of the trade may perhaps be acquired by anybody who makes the necessary effort but something more, surely, is needed to make a good correspondent. A bad correspondent, needless to add, is a liability to his paper. Newspapers would be well advised to consider the advantages of giving a minimum period of three months' training at the head-quarters to staff correspondents. That would help them to realise the office angle in the treatment of news and avoid common errors which new entrants may commit.

Let me now get back to the main thread of my talk today. The teleprinter records news from Reuters and A. P. I.; supplementary messages come in from other

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agencies; telegrams and telephones keep the office in touch with the staff correspondents; the day's post brings its quota of second class news from distant places; the reporters at head-quarters hand their stuff in, at all odd hours of the day; besides these, Public Relations Officers of institutions starting with Government and ending with companies shove their stuff in, for a little sneak publicity. Altogether a news-pool of prodigious proportions accumulates daily. They must be dealt with at once; cold news is dead news; and there is space in the paper only for a fraction of the news that pours in. It has been estimated in England that the news-pool grows as high as a million and half words per day, while the average space available in the day's issue can only hold about fifty-thousand words.

That should give you an idea of the job awaiting the editorial section. The process of selection and condensation calls for great experience. It is not merely a question of reconciling conflicting claims and interests. It is also a question of avoiding the pitfalls

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that may follow publication. The allotment of place and space, processing and captioning, go through with a mechanical swing, for, all the time, it is a race against time. Several editions are issued every day according to transport facilities and news importance; and every edition must go to press, dead on time, if the mail is not to be missed! Taking into consideration the multiple pressure under which a newspaper office works, who will deny that the finished paper is really a marvel of production? It may not be perfect, but it is something very near it; and let me add, that all that human ingenuity can suggest is improving the art of journalism every hour.

I have so far dealt with news; but news is not all that a newspaper gives. Apart from news, arising from and associated with publication of news, a newspaper has other responsibilities. It creates and consolidates public opinion, while reflecting and reacting to it. These functions are really logical developments arising from the primary service of news. When a particular

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item of news is published and its importance warrants it, the newspaper proceeds to provide a brief for the reader, to understand and appraise the news at its true worth. That is how editorial comments find a place in the newspaper; next, reactions of the readers to the news come in by way of correspondence; oftentimes, it becomes necessary to get somebody, who has devoted special attention to the subject, to write on it with special reference to the news of the day. These are known as contributions; if they are not copyrighted, they are published as extracts in other papers for the benefit of their readers.

I have thus indicated the different kinds of matter that go to make up the normal bill of fare in a newspaper, viz., news, editorial comment, correspondence, contributions and extracts. Barring news, the rest on analysis will be found to have a strong family likeness and may be classed under the generic name of comment. The point of distinction arises only out of the source of comment. When it is made by the Editor

it is called the editorial ; when made by the reader it is correspondence ; from an expert it becomes a contribution. Comment, therefore, whatever its source, follows news. It would be incorrect, however, to infer, from what I have said, that the newspaper first appeared as a daily sheet of news and that comments were a later addition, by a process of conscious and calculated development. As a matter of historical fact, the evolution of the newspaper came just the other way about.

When the newspaper took life it really started as a views-paper ; it found momentum as a propagandist pamphlet ; it achieved stability when it developed periodicity ; and the expanding needs of the times have carried it far beyond all original concepts. The range and reach of newspaper progressively widened ; it moved from city to district, from district to province and from province to country. Progress was not merely extensive but also intensive. It moved from the upper to the middle classes, from the leisured to the labouring classes.

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In this process of evolution it is inevitable that news should displace comment in importance. With a variety of classes and interests to cater to, news range widened and comment could not keep pace with it. A headline now serves as a comment for many items of news. It is this progressive encroachment of news space on comment that is mainly responsible for the revolution in newspaper conduct and control that we have witnessed in the 20th century. No longer is the Editor in complete charge of his paper. For one thing, the business end has become too important to be neglected; for another, the job of the Editor is to-day virtually held in commission by an editorial Board of all talents, as no single person can claim to possess knowledge and authority to deal with the many subjects calling for comment or notice. To many unsophisticated souls, it has often been a wonder how the paper carries on, in the absence of the Editor. What I have just said should enlighten them on the inwardness of the situation. The new term affected to symbolise

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authority in a newspaper office is the Managing Editor. He is presumed to manage the news as well as the business end of the paper. Believe me, his is not an easy task and whoever succeeds in it deserves special commendation. I shall have something more to say on the subject later.

III.

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Truth, it is often said, is stranger than fiction. I know a good few, pertaining to the newspaper art, floating around and about us, which have failed, however, to register; not because we ignore them, but because we are ignorant of their true import. What strikes our vision we fail to connect and correlate. Everybody gathered here, I take it, reads a daily newspaper. How many have paused to consider the economics of newspaper production? How many, for example, pay for the newspapers they read? If any one had bestowed thought and attention on this matter, he would have come to the startling conclusion

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that the majority of newspaper readers do not pay for their copies. In the bus, on the train, at the club, the same copy passes through several hands ; in many a mofussil station, I have seen copies move from house to house and street to street on a regular time schedule; and there are villages, to my knowledge, where the people foregather, at their hour of rest, to discuss and digest the news of the day, gathered from a single copy of the paper. In India it has been estimated that every copy of a popular daily may on an average claim as many as ten readers. If more than two read the same copy of a paper, the truth of my conclusion, that the majority do not pay, is demonstrably established.

The majority, I said, do not pay. I shall go a step further; I shall claim that the minority that pay, pay less than the cost of production. Take a paper like *The Hindu* for example. It used to sell at one anna per copy in normal times. Does anybody for a moment think that the cost of producing a

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sixteen to twenty-page issue will be covered by one anna? Total up the cost of printing and paper, service and administration, distribution and accounting, and divide it by the number of copies published. The cost of production per copy, thus arrived at will invariably be much higher than the anna at which it is sold. *The Hindu* is a well-established paper of over sixty years' standing. Its publishers may be presumed to know what they are about when they sell their copies below cost. Apparently they do it deliberately, and curiously enough, seem to thrive on the process too! Here is a truth that stares you in the face, day in and day out. How many, I wonder, have paused to read this riddle? It is not much of a riddle, once you apply your mind to it. The answer is there, again staring you in the face, in the copy that you handle daily. Along with news and comments in the paper you get, you find many columns of advertisement. There lies the answer to the riddle.

And you discover another fact of the truth in the process. Every newspaper

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reader, presumably, confers a benefit on the newspaper by the mere fact of his reading it. Twentieth century economics has discovered and developed a negotiable value for it also. It sounds mystifying, but the fact is, what the newspaper loses in the swings it gets back on the roundabouts. Let me explain it a little more fully. Newspapers derive their income from two sources, the subscribers and the advertisers. As the volume of the former increases, the value of the latter also increases; a reduction in subscription adds to the volume of the readers and therefore to the value of the publicity it carries. A reduction, therefore is not so much a matter of equity and goodwill, as good horse—sense and business acumen. 'Lower the tariff for the reader and raise the tariff for the advertiser' has become the motto of the modern newspaper. There is a limit beyond which the tariff for the reader cannot be lowered, if the paper is to be valued at all by him. That limit has reached as low as half penny for a full size paper in England. It can't go well below

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that unless it is offered free. That would be foolish, indeed, as none bothers to read what is given gratis.

The value of a newspaper depends on its range and reach ; unless it has a large reading public, it cannot serve public interest, nor will it engage advertising interest. The primary quest of a paper therefore is to develop its circulation. How is this to be done ? First by providing what is known as reader interest. This, at all times, is an uncertain and undefinable quantity. What interests one reader does not necessarily interest another. What is, therefore, attempted is to provide matter of interest to as large a section of the public as possible. It is common knowledge that few readers go through the whole paper. Some are interested in politics ; some in sports ; some in trade, industry, and commerce ; in these circumstances, parts of the newspaper are devoted to each of these sectional activities ; and that is how a newspaper builds up a multifaced clientele. While I am on

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the subject, it would be relevant to deal with a common complaint that most Indian papers devote disproportionate space to political news. Undoubtedly this is a fact, but it is easily explained. In a subject country seeking self-expression, the greatest common measure of interest is politics. The reactions of politics are far-reaching and there are few walks of life where its repercussions do not carry. Are you in business? There are limits to your development. Are you in service? There are key positions which you can never aspire to occupy. It is this knowledge that creates zest in politics among all and sundry, and, so long as these conditions endure, Indian papers are bound to devote major attention to political news and development. With that as the *piece de resistance*, Indian papers have not been slow to develop many-sided interest in its news contents.

Reader interest, however, is not enough to build large circulations. All readers do not buy their copies. The complementary factor that has been discovered to this end

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is to offer inducements for every reader to buy his copy. We in India are familiar with one such method. I refer to prize competition and coupon circulation. *The Times of India Weekly* provides the best known example. Week after week large prizes are offered for solutions of puzzles to be filled in coupons attached to each issue. A demand is created for copies of the issue in this fashion. The morality of the course is sought to be justified on the ground that it provides an intelligence test for the leisure hour. How far intelligence can be developed in this obscurantist fashion must be a matter of opinion. I know many who have puzzled over these puzzles and got only a headache for their reward. The temptation to get rich quick, however, is a very human failing which is not to be resisted by any ratiocination or even repeated disappointments. The prospect of landing a whacking prize tomorrow if not today, the day after if not tomorrow, keeps the supply of sucklings at full flow and whatever the morality of the transaction, there can be little doubt that

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as a stimulus to circulation the value of the method cannot be questioned. What is open to question, however, is whether from the point of view of either service or publicity such a circulation is worth having. I doubt, however, whether from the point of view of either service or publicity an unreal and inflated circulation is worth having. But advertisers, I presume, know their business best, and if they are easily satisfied, their money is certainly welcome to stabilise the paper and expand its services along less debatable lines.

Apart from this method which is fast falling into desuetude in the West, the other method, more in fashion there, is the insurance benefit offered to the readers. This came into vogue at the time of the last war when *The Daily News* introduced it to protect its readers from Zeppelin raids. It has since 'been copied by other papers to cover a variety of risks to their readers. The advantage to the newspaper is that readers must be registered and buy the

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paper regularly to qualify for the benefit. The insured sums are paid either by the newspapers themselves or by insurance companies offering to provide group policies. In many of the popular dailies in England a regular budget provision is made annually to cover the cost of this insurance which varies from 25 to 100 thousand sterling, according to the circulation of the paper. Under competitive conditions, the craze to build a circulation higher than rival papers has expressed itself in extravagant ways. In 1931—33 the *Daily Herald*, *Daily Express*, and the *Daily Mail* started a race to reach the two million mark and 50,000 canvassers wandered over the highways and byways of England, offering to astonished housewives a free selection of assorted goods, ranging from cameras, fountain pens and wrist watches to silk stockings and soft goods, if they would but register as readers for three months. The pace was too hot to last; a truce was called and the distribution of free gifts was stopped by mutual agreement. But the itch to go one better than your rival

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was still there and frequently asserted itself in the offer of goods at, or below, cost. It would interest you to know that most papers spend something like ten per cent of their estimated revenue on canvassing and publicity.

I have referred, at some length, to the means and methods adopted for building up the circulation of newspapers, advisedly. Anybody who seeks to understand the inwardness of newspaper production, must first realise that circulation is the centre-piece of the newspaper structure. Nobody wants to produce a paper for his own delectation. Readers must realise its value and importance. That necessarily involves a time-lag between production and stabilisation during which a paper must possess sufficient reserves and resources to stay the course. In effect a heavy entrance fee is exacted from new comers before they reach a self-supporting stage. It was reckoned that the *Daily Herald* had to sink something like two million Pounds before it found a

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firm foothold. This amount does not represent capital equipment but money spent in the acquisition of a good—will. That good will consists of the fact that a certain number of people take in the paper regularly ; until the reading clientele was built up there was a recurring loss, over a period of years, when the sales revenue did not cover cost of production. The standard cost of production, it has to be remembered, is set by established papers, enjoying a double income, one from the reader and the other from the advertiser. If it is recognised that the better part of the income of a newspaper is derived from the advertiser and not from the reader, it is easy to understand the risks of newspaper adventure and the magnitude of potential losses.

To establish a newspaper, under modern conditions of mass production and competitive service, a very large investment by way of mechanical equipment is called for. In India, where not one paper has yet reached the 100,000 mark, this has yet to be realised.

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The better established papers grew from small beginnings and with slender equipment. With the expansion of circulation, the advertising source of revenue developed and the business side of the venture received increasing attention. Rotary presses, linotype machines, and process departments came to be set up. Investment grew from tens of thousands to tens of lakhs of rupees. We have a long way to travel yet, before we can equal the progress in the West but, very definitely, we have reached the stage when newspaper enterprise has taken the proportions of a large-scale industry. The profits of the venture have begun to attract the attention of capitalists and some of them are already coquetting with the idea of a chain of newspapers in the capital cities of India, for purposes of their own. How far the invasion of hard-headed business men in a field of service calling for the best that men of ideals and character can give, bodes well for the spirit of newspaper venture, it is too early yet to judge. In a free country it has not proved an unmixed

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blessing. In a subject country, until the battle for freedom is won, an identity of interest among all sections of the public may serve to keep newspaper ideals pure, if not unalloyed. Once the battle of freedom is won, however, a clash of interest is bound to assert itself, and what the future has in store it would be profitless to prophesy.

The emphasis I have laid on circulation and the importance I have attached to advertisement revenue may, possibly, give rise to the impression that newspapers have lost, or are bound to lose, their independence to the advertiser. Such an impression is unwarranted. Advertisers are not a homogeneous body owing allegiance to any common principles, programme, or policies. It also stands to reason that businessmen do not dole out largesses for the benefit of newspapers. They spend money to develop their own business. Their only concern, in the circumstances, is that the policy of the paper is not such as will lose it its readers. They are interested in the readers, not in respect of their social or political

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views, but only in regard to their practical resources and potential needs. All that a newspaper offers is the opportunity for the enterprising businessman to get into touch with and cater to the needs of its clientele. What is therefore germane to the quest of the businessman is whether, in fact, the newspaper possesses the circulation it claims to have, and whether it is of a character likely to be interested in his goods.

Between the newspaper and the advertiser, there has interposed itself a third party, of recent years, which seeks to find a living by reconciling the two interests. I refer to advertising agencies. From two-thirds to three-fourths of the money spent on press publicity in India, comes from foreign manufacturers seeking contacts and clientele in this country. The first line of prospects they expect to contact consist of the foreigners in the country bred to a high standard of life. Next come the better-placed English-read Indians; last come ordinary folk with rising standards and

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expanding needs. It is easy to understand therefore how first Anglo-Indian papers, next Indian-owned English papers, and last vernacular papers have progressively moved into the advertising orbit. Every decade of this century, to my knowledge, has registered an increase in the advertisement allotment to the Press. There are no figures available to show how much is spent annually, but I should not be surprised if the amount exceeds the entire revenue of a State like Travancore. Such a large allotment calls for knowledge and guidance in appropriation, and it is this that advertising agencies are presumed to provide. They are not mere space-brokers. They claim to possess expert knowledge in the selection of media, preparation of copy, and planning of campaigns ; and they offer their services free to the advertiser. How then do they maintain themselves ? They get their commission from the newspapers.

Newspapers have found it to their advantage to encourage and standardise the

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practice. The only defect in the system, as it is applied to India, is that agencies do not possess sufficient data for the work they offer to do. The selection of media is based on coverage and pulling power. Few papers offer certificates of circulation to bear out their claims. Where they are provided they do not represent figures based on averages extending over a period of months. Apart from this the assessment of circulation has also to take note of the fact that every copy sold means several readers. It is in these circumstances that an element of caprice enters the choice of media. That is to be noticed not in the first choices nor even in the second choices of an advertising campaign but in the third choices made to complete it. The offer of lower rates and higher commission may tip the scale and yield a result not justified on merits. Fortunately before total degeneration set in, the Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society proceeded to take the matter in hand. Carrying on its rolls the cream of the Indian Press without whose co-operation no newspaper

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publicity campaign is possible in the country, it proceeded to enunciate and establish mutually helpful relations between the Press and the agencies. Business was to be accepted only from recognised agencies and recognition was to be awarded only to agencies conforming to the rules and regulations prescribed by the Society ; at the same time, newspapers were asked to avoid rate-cutting and provide circulation certificates in prescribed form. Recognition of an advertising agency was to be subject to periodic revision and its continuance contingent on the business placed by the agency with members of the Society. I believe conditions are fairly set for the future, and once the inhibitions of war are removed progress at an accelerated pace may well be expected.

Before I close, there is one other point I would like to refer to. I have said that advertisers as a class are not interested in and do not seek to exercise control over newspaper policy. It must be confessed,

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however, that the presence of the advertiser in the offing and as a potent factor in newspaper economy has tended to act as a curb on the free growth of healthy journalism. Circulation is fast becoming the be-all and end-all of existence. A high level of circulation is necessary to secure and maintain advertisement revenue and that is possible in practice only by writing down to the level of the lower middle classes. That is why in the popular press there is so much that is sensational, and so little that appeals to reason. It becomes good policy to make the most of topics which have the widest appeal. Reader interest has come to be interpreted in terms of excitement, sensation and even impropriety. News-featuring has taken new connotations and expresses itself in arresting headlines, snappy paras and disembowelled thoughts. Interest has often degenerated into entertainment bordering on the vulgar. It is difficult to defend the fall in standards except by reference to the law of survival. If you are engaged in newspaper production you have

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to take note of the conditions under which you produce. These conditions which have pulled down the level of production elsewhere are fast enveloping the Indian horizon and how far Indian papers, with their great traditions of service and sacrifice, can hold out for the purity of journalism remains to be seen.

IV

ORGANIZATION AND CONTROL

I have had occasion to refer to the power of the Press on an earlier occasion and examine at some length what it was based on and how it accrued to the Press. Power corrupts and unless it is construed in terms of responsibility, cannot last. All history bears out this fundamental truth. If the power of the Press is to endure, it must so interpret its duties and obligations as to conform to the highest standards of public life. These standards are not defined by metes and bounds. They are adaptations, I presume, from the gentlemen's code, another indefinite and undefinable quantity. The Ten Commandments of the Bible provide, perhaps, the negative basis of this code, while our own scriptures emphasise the

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positive aspects in the twin rules of conduct *viz.*, Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara. Those who built up the power of the Press showed a lively sense of responsibility, and power came unasked to them. Gifted beyond the ordinary and moved by the urge to serve, heedless of consequences, these great men left a rich heritage to inspire and guide the Knights of the Pen in the future. Conditions, however, have changed and what started as a call has grown into a calling. Great journalists, it may still be true, are born and not made, but it cannot be denied that journalism has taken professional proportions and those who man it today are largely careerists in search of a competence. If the quality of the service they render is to be maintained at high levels, it is necessary to ensure that they possess, at least, the qualifications for the adequate discharge of their responsibilities; it is necessary also to ensure that salary and service conditions are such as would place them above want and beyond temptation. This is a matter of interest not only to the Press if

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it is to preserve its purity but also to the public to provide for its security.

It is a pity that sufficient attention has not been bestowed yet on the recruitment and emoluments of journalists. So far as the business side of a newspaper venture is concerned the interests of the men engaged are protected by the standard set by parallel institutions employing like talent. But the news-side of the newspaper, which is really its basic side, has been long neglected. Sad as it is to confess, there has been shameless exploitation, also, by men who are not ashamed to preach to others. I have known of institutions whose mainstay for news work is volunteer service. Young men, fresh from the University, impressionable and unsophisticated, oftentimes, mistake a little facility in writing for a flair for journalism and volunteer for training in newspaper offices. They draw no salary or allowance during their period of apprenticeship, often extending from one to two years. At the end of their period of training, not infrequently, they discover to their dismay

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that the office has no further use for them. Their value to the paper they served, presumably, started and ended with their free service. There are also newspaper offices where part-time employment is offered on a mere pittance, to men engaged in other walks of life. These methods which savour of bad economy and worse exploitation can hardly redound to the credit of men whose professed mission in life is to serve the public interest. Men in the permanent service of the paper are not a contented lot either. The level of salaries obtaining in the profession was fixed at a time when papers themselves were struggling for existence. Conditions have improved steadily for the papers but this has not been reflected in service emoluments. It is only during the last two or three years when war-conditions imposed a further strain on the slender earnings of the journalistic breed of Lazarus that agitation has been gathering momentum for living wages and service amenities. The President of the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference has been

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instrumental in appointing a committee to draw up a minimum wage charter, and I hope with the co-operation and goodwill of the Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society, the reformist movement will achieve the object intended.

The provision of suitable 'salaries and service conditions, on which attention seems to be concentrated for the moment cannot by itself provide a permanent solution. It is necessary that attention should be devoted at the same time to improving the knowledge and equipment of those who seek a career in the profession of journalism. Knowledge and equipment, I may emphasise, are distinct from training and technique. I am led to stress this distinction, in view of the controversy that raged over the founding of a degree or diploma course in journalism by the Universities of Calcutta and Madras ten years back. For lack of appreciation of this distinction, I am afraid, a good opportunity was lost to provide better recruits for the Press. It cannot be denied that those who now enter the profession would make better

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craftsmen, in double quick time, if they had not to learn by the method of error and correction, what they are expected to know in the practice of their profession. Knowledge of the law of libel and slander, for example, would have saved many an enthusiast from regrettable lapses; many in fact do not know that, in the eye of the law, newspapers do not possess any better rights than ordinary citizens; and those whose ambitions run high in the profession could do with better grounding in constitutional law and practice, public finance and administration, rural economics and local self-government. The claim for higher pay and better conditions will be irresistible if quality improves and qualifications are unexceptionable. Reform in these directions must come from within, but the public are also entitled to have a say in the matter, as ultimate paymasters of the service.

Journalists proper occupy but a small sector in a rapidly widening newspaper organisation. They may rate themselves as

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the corps-de-elite of the paper ; they may be reckoned even as the soul of the paper ; but with an outsize in body, it looks as though the soul is fast getting itself lost in its labyrinthine proportions. Direction and control of the organisation may no longer be claimed to be in the Editor's hands unless he happens to be the proprietor also. The name of Managing Editor, increasingly affected in the journalistic world is not without significance. It is a tacit recognition of the change that is fast creeping in. I am not concerned with all that it signifies, but I should like to draw attention to one aspect arising from the shift of control. Controls exercised over the production of a paper are of a two-fold character—one external and the other internal. I shall deal first with internal controls. This has been largely exercised by the Editor in the past. It was for him to decide what to publish and what not to publish. For the discharge of his duties to the community, it is necessary and desirable that he should have unfettered discretion in the conduct of the paper. The

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exercise of that discretion may be erratic, often capricious, but so long as it is not motivated by considerations of private profit or personal advantage, it will not hurt the community. Once, however, control comes to be manipulated to serve or safeguard the economic interests of the paper, to that extent public interests are prejudiced. With control going out of the hands of the Editor, the presumption is that the service motive has yielded place to the profit motive. A modern newspaper has been forced into the position of a capitalist organisation and unless the capitalist is gifted with sufficient vision not to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs the shift in internal control may well lead in time to the disintegration of the newspaper's influence on the body-politic.

Of external controls on publication the most direct are those imposed by law. The major restrictions falling under this category arise from the law of Libel and the law of Contempt. It is difficult to provide clear guidance for the working journalist in

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respect of these laws. Case-law seems but to confuse their implications and authoritative opinion has frequently urged reform of the laws. While this is awaited, newspapers have found it to their advantage to settle libel actions out of court and offer unqualified apology whenever contempt proceedings are started. Few will deny that this represents a sorry state of affairs. Laws designed to serve the public interest should not lend themselves to be interpreted to defeat these ends. In India the Press has been subject to special legislation of increasing intensity ever since it developed power and prestige. It is not my intention here, nor is it relevant to my purpose, to examine at length or in detail the various measures that the Government have placed from time to time on the Statute book with a view to controlling the Press during the last 125 years. Government early recognised that a free press and a foreign administration were fundamentally incompatible. As early as 1822 we find this clearly and unambiguously stated in a memorable minute

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recorded by Sir Thomas Munro, then Governor of Madras. He said that the first duty of a free press would be to free the country from the foreign yoke, and when that foreign domination was maintained by means of a native army, the change-over, unless the press was controlled, would be not merely rapid but even violent.

It is this fundamental conflict of interest between the Government and the governed in India that has led to the enactment of laws not to be found in free countries. The course of legislation indeed provides a graphic study of the march of events in this country. From censorship to licensing, from licensing to registration the curve goes down as the tone and temper of the Anglo-Indian Press altered; then a sudden jerk, born out of the fear of the Vernacular press, is noticed; the rising curve drops again as the Government coquet with the people in the early years of the Congress. Ten years later the red cone goes up with the plague riots in Bombay and the Sedition laws are tightened. The agitation over the

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partition of Bengal yields the Newspaper Incitement to Offences Act; with the inauguration of the Swadeshi movement, the Press Act comes to stay. We have since had, as a souvenir of the Civil Disobedience movement, the Indian Press Emergency Powers Act, amended successively by the Criminal Law Amendment Acts. The Indian Press has not allowed itself to be depressed or dismayed by this spate of legislation. In one sense it was a compliment to the Press, for it recognised its part and place in the freedom movement. It also underlines the fear that invaded seats of authority. Repressive legislation served also to emphasise the need for an organisation of the Press to safeguard its common interests. These interests, however, eluded grasp, until the advent of the war. The war that was to save democracy for the world naturally roused great expectations in the country, but as hopes turned into fears and suspicions settled into distrust, the administration got alarmed and it looked as though authority would lose its head

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altogether under the cumulative strain of war and peace.

The threat of pre-censorship over the entire Press roused them as nothing else could have done. For the first time, Indian and Anglo-Indian, English and Vernacular papers met in conference to protect their rights, irrespective of political differences. Over this conference Mr. K. Srinivasan, Editor of *The Hindu*, presided and showed a truly amazing grasp of the fundamentals of the issues involved. The formula that he suggested as a working arrangement and the machinery that he proposed to supervise and strengthen the arrangement, carrying as it did the warm support and willing co-operation of the Anglo-Indian Press also, could not fail to impress the Government. What is frequently referred to as 'a gentleman's agreement' followed and the Viceroy, I may mention, took special interest and went out of his way to give it a fair start. In spite of it all, I must confess, the system of Press Advisory Committees, did not yield uniform

results in all provinces or even consistent results in the same province. I myself went on a goodwill mission with Sir Francis Low, Editor of *The Times of India* to meet Sir Maurice Hallett, the Governor of the United Provinces, and plead for a new deal. I am afraid, we did not get much change out of him. The shadow of the past kept intruding on the present and Press relations in the United Provinces provided perennial problems for the executive of the Conference. In the Punjab, the Press Advisory Committee never got a chance to justify itself, while in Bengal a strong and representative committee could not prevent Government from taking the bit between its teeth and doing an occasional bolt. Only in Madras and Bombay can the system be claimed to have worked with advantage, and this in a large measure was due to the spirit of goodwill that distinguished all discussions.

The Government of India might have stopped the rot if they had only asserted themselves. Their own record was not clean, however. The temptation to use powers of

military censorship for political purposes was not easy to resist and the proceedings of the Standing Committee of the Conference bear ample testimony to the frequent abuse of these powers. Publication of matter prejudicial to the success of the war has been progressively interpreted to include all that may directly or indirectly affect civilian morale and a perusal of the Defence of India Regulations as they apply to the Press, will show that the Press functions today more by the sufferance of authorities than by any skill of their own. Essentially it is an unfair position, looked at from any point of view. To clothe the executive with powers which may easily lend themselves to abuse, especially in a country struggling for self-expression, is surely not the best way to serve or safeguard civilian morale. War effort is not to be stimulated or sustained either by doing violence to fundamental canons for honesty, justice or fairplay. It is unfortunate that men in authority should take such a shortsighted view of their duties and

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responsibilities. The Press, however, has carried on undaunted and the measure of the service it has rendered has found recognition, curiously enough, at the hands of the highest authority in the country. In his farewell address to the Central Legislature, Lord Linlithgow said: "Occasions there may have been when there were differences of view on matters connected with the Press; misunderstandings there may have been from time to time; but I remain deeply grateful to this great institution for its fairness; its eager anxiety to serve the public; its concern to observe and if possible to improve the best traditions of journalism; and I would not like to leave India without paying this public tribute to it and to that hardworking body of intelligent and able men by whom India is so well served in the Press". I value this testimony because it comes from one who has been exposed to unceasing criticism, for his many acts of commission and omission, at the hands of the Press.

I am afraid I have somewhat digressed from the main theme. I was dealing with external controls on publication. Apart from direct control arising from the limits prescribed by Law and Administration, there are many indirect controls reflected in the body of the paper. The most important of these is the influence of the reader on the paper. Circulation, as I have pointed out, is the linchpin of newspaper finance, for advertisement revenue is based on it. To have and to hold a large body of readers, it is necessary to cater to their needs and requirements. The intrusion of a magazine section for example in a daily paper can hardly be justified except on a broad definition of news. Whatever else may be claimed for it, none will deny that it is not news in the accepted sense. Fashion notes and personal news, again, have found a place in the paper for the same reason. In fact instruction has yielded place to interest and interest is coming to be interpreted as entertainment. The snobbery of the middle-class has to be catered to, but not content with that some

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papers have sunk to the level of satisfying even salacious tastes. If it is remembered that only a small fraction of the newspool that accumulates daily in a newspaper office is picked out for publication and yet room is found for things that have no news-value and can serve no public interest, the only inference possible is that reader-interest plays no mean part in the publication of matter. After the reader comes the advertiser for a little judicious puff. Few papers can resist a pressure exercised in terms of persuasion. A balance-sheet is published as advertisement and a news para drawing attention to its salient features is smuggled in. A prospectus is published as advertisement and a news para drawing attention to it follows. Publicity officers of private companies regularly send news and notes of their products for favour of free insertion on the hit-or-miss principle. There was a time when Government had no use for publicity. Of recent years heads of departments seem to have got over their shyness, for they hold periodic press conferences, provide

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literature to the press and cultivate pleasant relations with the Press. It looks as though with every passing year a barrage of pressure on a multilateral front is developing on news contents and news treatment.

Control, as I see it today, may no longer be claimed to be subjective, it has become objective in a large measure ; Paradoxical as it may sound, the greater the circulation of the the paper less is the freedom of its Editor. With changing conditions, a new problem has been posed for the Editor; should he give the people what they like or what he considers is good for them ? It is a difficult choice, for if he does not give what the people want he may not sell ; if he gives what they want, competition among papers may lead to a progressive deterioration in popular taste. Verily it is a vicious circle, and one wonders whether the standards cultivated by a succession of gentlemen-journalists will ere long come to be interpreted in terms of commercial morality. In India the problem has not yet reached the

fourth dimension. Conditions in the post war period however are not easy to picture. Far-reaching changes may follow. For example, the development of civil aviation may widen the reach of provincial papers. Today the *Statesman* is published in Calcutta and Delhi simultaneously; the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* at Calcutta and Allahabad; some of the South Indian papers contemplate similar publication at Madras, Madura and Bezwada. Such success as has attended these efforts to develop circulation has arisen from the fact that the limitations of distance are sought to be cleared by duplication of plants with synthesis of contents. These advantages, however, may not last if civil aviation develops and a paper is able to move along a radius of a 1000 miles within a few hours of publication. Then, again, industrialisation lies in the offing. It is this industrial civilization that has sought to mechanise values. Will the Indian papers that have not been exposed yet to the temptations of their western contemporaries follow the same lines of deterioration in

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standards? One can only hope that the cultural heritage of the East will save them from gliding down the slopes of Gadarene.

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